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Ando: Inside Out

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FEATURE

ANDO – INSIDE OUT

by Noel J Brady

During the later years of my formal education in the midst of the so called Post Modern period, some of us sought solace in the stunningly beautiful monochrome images of *Japan Architect* (JA). Then, as a monthly magazine, it offered a glimpse into a world that seemed completely unattainable, a mature, robust, even belligerent architectural response to the contemporary world, brash yet avoiding the brutality of the brutalists in Europe and the US, with an attention to light and detail. It was the apparent freedom with which these works, liberated or so we thought from history^[1], provided the antidote to the slavish historicism of some Post Modernists. We were astounded by the rawness of Kazuo Shinohara, jealous of the sensuous pencil renderings of Shin Takamatsu's mechanical ideal and envious of the stripped down précised Modernism of Ando. Ando was easily the most accessible, because on the face of it appeared familiar. Perhaps it was its clarity of purpose, its single mindedness, its cerebral stubbornness which attracted the student. This stubbornness is echoed in stories emanating from the Dojo that is the office of Tadao Ando & Associates.

"Trees would be more consistent..." ^[2]

This propensity for stubbornness has been attributed to his birthplace of Osaka and his early career as a boxer even, as we are led to believe, his lack of social status within the rigid confines of Japanese Culture. The early work soon took on the outward expression of a particular resistance. This concretised into a bounding wall, a verifiable dam, which protected the site, its inhabitants and culture from the chaos at the doorstep. It does not take a great leap of faith to connect Ando's experiences as a child growing up following the annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to a desire to look inwards, to find solace in creation.

"The primary significance of enclosure is the creation of a place for oneself, an individual zone with society." ^[3]

"I employ the wall to delineate a space that is physically and psychologically isolated from the outside world." ^[4]

Aerial views of Osaka or Tokyo confirm the chaos of this "outside" world. Within the carefully manicured frame of Ando's delineation a certain sense of order prevails. His work might be compared to the Bonsai gardener, trimming and arranging the elements to deceive in terms of space and time. But this is what all architects aspire to; a creative order. Ando is only one of a number of key contemporary Japanese figures seeking to address the concerns of Modernism and Japanese aesthetics. If Kengo Kuma rediscovered the traditional screen, Ando rediscovered its fundamental geometry. Because we appear to

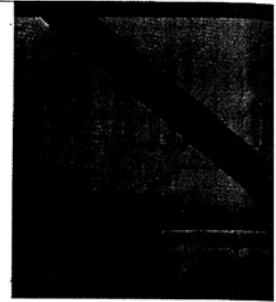
share a common modern visual heritage we presume to understand it and believe it to be truly universal. However despite its concreteness of Ando's work, its so-called universalism the intention remains resolutely Japanese.

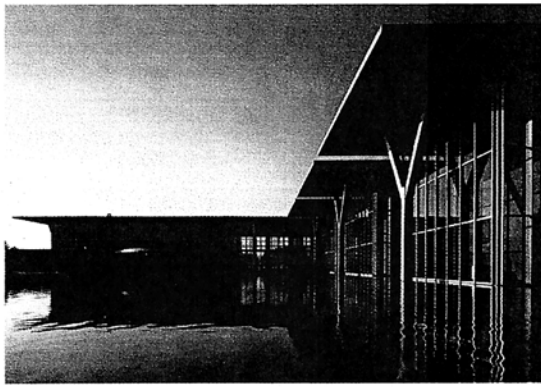
"I create architectural order on the basis of geometry, the basic axis of which is simple forms – subdivisions of the square, the rectangle, the circle. In addition I attempt to choose from the forces latent in a particular region where I am working, and in this way to develop a theory of parts that is founded upon the sensibilities of the Japanese people." ^[5]

Ando may strive to create the non differential space of the Pantheon. However it is in the tradition of Minka houses, Katsura Villa and the Ise Shrines that further clues to Ando's defensive attitude can be found. Their architectonic schemes of multi layered fences, screens and territories provide a window into the minds of Ando. Prior to the very late introduction of perspective to Japan, the primary representational mode was orthographic or oblique projections. This can be clearly seen in the wood prints of Hiroshige and Hokusai. Ando's early work concentrates on similar modes of representation, perspective entering later, in Mount Rokko Chapel for example, to describe the interior. The slippage of shoji screens and fences can be found in residue of the plywood concrete formwork of the early residences, such as Matsumoto and Koshino. This utilitarian material has transformed from packaging to wrapping by virtue of the high level of attention given to its manufacture and finishing. This later fact is often lost on the western observer. Henry Plummer's "Light in Japanese Architecture" is one of only a few publications that has come close to capturing the quality of the concrete Ando achieves in his work.

"Enclosed in small spaces, people can allow their thoughts to range into infinity. When they do so, at the extreme limit of contemplation they can hear the voices of nature and travel to cosmic distances. The Japanese interpretation of time and aesthetic awareness is essential to the generation of spaces as condensed as those of Sukiya buildings." ^[6]

By avoiding the axial conditioning of much of western architecture, by entering along the wall, alongside the main spaces awkward sites could be adapted, exploited. The dense grain of urban Osaka became a field of possibilities, stuck as it were between a rock and a hard place. By compressing time and space, Ando has sought to provide an environment which heightens one's awareness of the external environment; opening up a small vista to creation outside, including yet screening, embracing yet editing the world outside. Maybe this is what inspired him in the Pantheon.

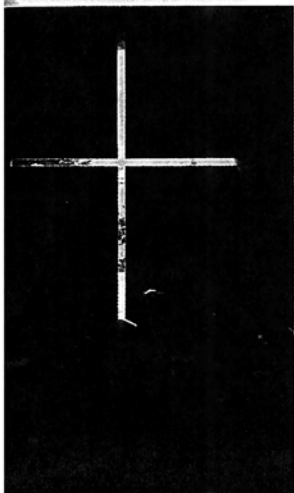




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4



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1,2 Koshino residence

3 Museum of Modern Art Fort Worth

4 Church of the Water

5 Church of Light

All by: Tadao Ando & Associates

*"I never saw a man who looked
With such a wistful eye
Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky,
And at every drifting cloud that went
With sails of silver by."* [7]

If Ando is a prisoner by choice, contemplating the horizon, he is not a model prisoner. Fighting his way out of the box, each move, martial like, opens up a new possibility for light, space and nature to enter. Moreover he was not necessarily the first to engage in such speculations about light or space but he was its most consistent proselytiser.

"This tense relationship between inside and outside is based on the act of cutting (as with a sword), which to the Japanese is not cruel and destructive but is instead sacred; it is a ceremonial act symbolising a new disclosure. To the Japanese this act has become an end in itself. It provides a spiritual focus both in space and time." [8]

While the technical and proportional systems at play in Ando's work are clear it is increasingly difficult to write about the work in any meaningful way as the medium through which the message is relayed has become instead the message. The belligerent inner dialogue that dominates his early work has dissipated into a monologue which due to his increasing fame expands with each successive work. The tendency towards some sort of Palladian ideal of pure space has evolved into Boullée like proportions.

Speaking and thinking are closely related. Bono referred to the fact that Ando not only found a voice but also invented a language. To the outside observer this appeared very early on in his career, when other architects are barely getting to grips with the fact they have a voice at all. But as pointed out in relation to Aalto and others, time and events conspire to provide the necessary environment by which certain things are possible, by which architects may find themselves with both the means and the opportunities to create something special. The architect must be prepared to act at these times, but he must also know how to act.

"Tadao Ando didn't just find his own voice he invented a language, a visual language that reveres landscape and light with a kind of awe. Awesome is the right word because it is a clue to Ando's state of mind." [9]

He has been most successful when his back was against the wall, when there was much to resist against. He says that "in the

beginning I just wanted to create." [10] It was from these modest beginnings that Ando has emerged to be one of the most celebrated architects of our age. From this plateau he has chosen to move his concerns to that of the world at large.

"I do not believe architecture should speak too much. It should remain silent and let nature in the guise of sunlight and wind speak. Sunlight changes in quality with the passage of time. They (the elements) activate space, make us aware of the season, and nurture within us a finer sensitivity." [11]

I think that it is interesting that one of his most recent projects is the Modern Art Museum Art Fort Worth is an idea turned outside in. The hard shell is on the inside. Tadao Ando has turned himself inside out and embraces the world no longer resisting its advances.

Tadao Ando's lecture *Creating the Dream* took place in the RDS, Dublin on 23 September 2007. The lecture was jointly organised by the RIAI and IMMA and sponsored by the Kerlin Gallery and the Clarence Hotel.

Notes

- [1] Later the maturing Isosaki would take to referencing the Campidoglio and other classical devices.
- [2] Bono referring to the consistency expected by Ando of his staff, RDS 23 September 2007.
- [3] "Tadao Ando – A Wedge in Circumstances" JA 243, June 1977.
- [4] "Tadao Ando – The Wall as Territorial Delineation" JA 254, June 1978.
- [5] "Tadao Ando – From self enclosed modern Architecture towards Universality", JA 301, May 1978.
- [6] Ibid.
- [7] Oscar Wilde – "The Ballad of Reading Gaol", July 7, 1896.
- [8] "Tadao Ando – Introduction to Tadao Ando Buildings Projects", Writings Rizzoli 1984.
- [9] Bono in the introduction to Tadao Ando, RDS 23 September 2007.
- [10] Tadao Ando press conference RDS 23 September 2007.
- [11] "Tadao Ando – Introduction to Tadao Ando Buildings Projects", Writings Rizzoli 1984.